

# KDHE Partners with City of Lyons on Lead Prevention Efforts

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Lyons has become the first city in the state to partner with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) in a program aimed at reducing instances of lead poisoning among Kansas children.

In recognition of the achievement, Tom Langer, KDHE representative with the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (CLPPP), presented the Lyons City Council with a certificate of appreciation during the council's meeting at city hall.

"I am absolutely astounded at the speed with which John Sweet (city administrator) moved on this," said Langer. "He certainly was quick to grasp the scope of the problem, and he understands how it impacts your community."

Last month, the city council added a section to an existing ordinance dealing with building permits. The addition says the city won't issue building permits for work on or within homes built before 1978, without a signed document from the owner or occupant confirming receipt of the EPA pamphlet titled *Protect Your Family From Lead in Your Home*.

Administered by KDHE, the Lead Poisoning Prevention Program was created in 1999 and uses a comprehensive strategy to reduce Kansans' exposure to lead poisoning, especially as found in lead-based paints.

That strategy mainly involves educating residents about the risks of lead poisoning, but also includes a medical surveillance program and a certification, licensure, accreditation and enforcement program for contractors dealing with lead-based paint.

The KDHE program also includes pre-renovation education, which requires disclosure of potential lead-based hazards in the home by contractors who disturb older painted surfaces.

The city council's addition to the ordinance is part of this strategy, and distribution of the EPA pamphlet enables home occupants to educate themselves about risks to their health and to take precautions.

"The legislation you enacted allows us as a state agency to see to it that laws currently on the books are enacted at the local level," Langer said. "It is impossible for us to come out and talk to every contractor, so we look to the cities to help us get the word out.

"What you have done is take a great step forward to protect the residents of your fine city, especially those who are least able to take care of themselves, our children."



Tom Langer, left, KDHE representative with the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (CLPPP), presents Lyons City Administrator John Sweet, with a certificate of appreciation during a recent council meeting at city hall. KDHE and the city of Lyons have partnered to change existing city ordinances that strengthen construction and renovation codes to protect residents from potentially deadly lead poisoning, especially among the community's children.

Highly toxic, elevated levels of lead in the body are known to cause a host of health problems including central nervous system dysfunction, organ failure, vision loss, cognitive disorders and even death. Children under age 5 are especially at risk.

Lead is most dangerous as miniscule particles are inhaled or ingested. In that state, exposure is mostly through airborne lead from motor fuel or in lead dust from deteriorating lead-based paint.

According to KDHE, when surfaces covered with lead-based paint are disturbed or deteriorate, they release lead dust. Children then ingest the dust through normal hand-to-mouth activity. Since most homes built prior to 1978 have lead-based paint, there is often a direct correlation with home renovation and lead poisoning.

"In Lyons, 90 percent of the homes were built before 1978, and of that, more than 50 percent of the housing stock was built before 1960," said Langer. "With just those numbers, we know with a statistical certainty that those homes built before 1960 do have lead in some shape or form, most often in painted surfaces."

Langer said today that the city's ordinance is part of a larger lead elimination awareness partnership.

"It's not just about the contractor," he said. "Yesterday I spoke with Jayne Yates (Rice County Health Department), who is the designated lead nurse in Rice County. With all the renovations going on in Lyons under the various grant programs, there could be a rise in children ingesting lead dust. We want to be prepared in advance to watch and monitor that."

"KDHE will partner with the health department to provide materials and to help test for elevated lead levels during the health fair in Lyons in March. We'll provide educational materials and make residents aware of the problem so they can be better prepared."

"Ignorance is not bliss. The city gets that, and it's going to make sure contractors know it, too. The people who enforce the city code will be our (KDHE) representatives and make sure the program is monitored and the laws followed."

"The city council has shown good leadership through this," said Sweet. "Now, all general contractors who work in Lyons must have lead safety training. And we'll continue to emphasize that we adhere to the maximum safety standards in our community."

"Your action has made a valuable contribution toward preventing lead poisoning, and we are very appreciative of this," said Langer yesterday. "I have been working with other cities and sometimes it can be like pulling nails out of an old piece of wood to get them to see this."

"While this issue doesn't receive a lot of attention, it's one that's very important. We've been living with lead in our environment for hundreds of years, and finally, we are waking up and saying we are going to make sure our children and grandchildren are protected, and future generations of Kansans will prosper for it."